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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 002076

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS, USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: PEACE PROCESS: AKASHI VISITS, OFFERS TO HOST
CEASEFIRE TALKS; RAJAPAKSE UPSET WITH NORWEGIANS; NORWEGIAN
AMBASSADOR TALKS TOUGH TO TIGERS

REF: (A) COLOMBO 2054 (B) COLOMBO 2003

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Japanese Special Envoy Akashi found President Rajapakse eager to take up ceasefire implementation talks and willing to use a venue outside of Sri Lanka. Akashi offered Japan for the first round. Rajapakse was upset at reported comments of Norwegian Envoy Eric Solheim that Norway would take up its facilitator role only if certain "conditions" were met. Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar has had frank discussion with both sides and warned the Tigers Norway will not act as facilitator during a low intensity war. Norway awaits GSL approval of dates for a political-level visit before facilitation efforts can start. Akashi is focused on statement which would come from Dec 19 Co-Chairs meeting; we tried to get him to think about more basic issue of Co-Chairs role in changed Sri Lankan situation. END SUMMARY

2. (U) Japanese Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi visited Sri Lanka December 8-11 in anticipation of Dec 19 Co-Chairs meeting. Akashi met with Ambassador Lunstead on Dec 9, then met with entire Co-Chairs group on Dec 10 before his departure. Akashi met most of the Colombo-based players and traveled to the Eastern area of Ampara; at the request of the GSL he did not go to Kilinocchi for meetings with the LTTE.

3. (C) At his Dec 9 meeting with President Rajapakse, Akashi found the President extremely upset with comments from Norwegian Special Envoy Eric Solheim reported in the press that Norway would be willing to take up its facilitation role if both sides met certain (unspecified) "conditions." Rajapakse viewed this as an insult to a sovereign country. Aside from this, Rajapakse made points similar to those he has made to Ambassador and Co-Chairs (reftels):

- his highest priority is the peace process;
- he is willing to consider a "high degree of devolution of powers," citing India as an example;
- he believes Norway should not be both facilitator and head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), and muses about other countries joining the SLMM;
- he wants to start talks on cease-fire implementation, and is willing to hold them outside of Sri Lanka if the Tigers insist.

On the latter point, Akashi said that Japan was willing to host the first round of ceasefire implementation talks, an offer which he made public at his pre-departure press conference. Akashi also noted that after musing on SLMM expansion, Rajapakse had said he would like the Co-Chairs to discuss the issue. Akashi said that "when they (the GSL) don't have an answer, they want one from us."

5. (C) Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar said that at his Dec 7 meeting with Rajapakse, after asking Norway to continue as facilitator, the President had said: "So, when do you start?" Brattskar interpreted this as the President handing the ball to Norway and asking them to run with it, thereby taking the pressure off himself to move forward. Brattskar explained to Rajapakse that it was not that simple, both sides had to agree and the conditions needed to be right. For one, Norway expected that the GSL would not publicly criticize Norway and question its impartiality. Before anything happened, Norway expected to have a "political-level visit" by Special Envoy Eric Solheim. Solheim was ready to visit the week of December 12, but the GSL had not yet given a positive signal.

6. (C) Brattskar visited Kilinocchi Dec 9 and met with the LTTE's Tamilchelvan. Brattskar expressed disappointment about the Tamil boycott of the Presidential election; Tamilchelvan denied the Tigers enforced it and said it was the "peoples' will." Brattskar raised the Jaffna claymore mine attacks on the Sri Lankan Army and Tamilchelvan denied responsibility, putting it onto "the people" or a "third force." Brattskar warned Tamilchelvan that Norway was willing to facilitate the peace process, but it would not be "observers of a low intensity war."

7. (C) In their individual meeting, Ambassador asked Akashi what he expected at the Dec 19 Co-Chairs meeting. Akashi

predicted discussions on the outcome of the Sri Lankan election and an analysis of LTTE behavior, but focused on the meeting statement. He said it would be important for the Co-Chairs not to side fully with the government, but to offer support if the GSL put forward viable suggestions. He noted that any statement issued after the Co-Chairs meeting should be nuanced in language and tone so as not to fuel nationalism in the South, especially among the JVP and the Buddhist monk-based Jathika Hela Urumaya. Ambassador returned to this issue at the larger Co-Chairs meeting, suggesting that the Dec 19 meeting should focus on the question of what the task of the Co-Chairs should be in the new situation in which: --the Government had rejected large parts of the former peace process and the Oslo Declarations acceptance of federalism (though seeming to be willing to accept a federal-type system in fact, if not in name), and

--the LTTE had raised questions in Prabhakaran's Heroes Day speech and in Balasingham's follow-up speech about whether it wanted international community involvement, and,

--LTTE actions such as the Jaffna and Eastern Province attacks called into doubt their attitude toward the entire peace process.

18. (C) Ambassador continued that the GSL's sole desire from the Co-Chairs was to put pressure on the LTTE. It was important to try to find ways to motivate the Tigers, but the Co-Chairs had to be clear that they supported the Peace Process, not one party to the process. In this regard, it might be better to issue a short statement expressing support for the Peace Process and urging adherence to the ceasefire, rather than the usual laundry list of items, thus sending a message to both sides that it was not just business as usual. Akashi was a bit taken aback by this idea, but EC Ambassador Wilson was enthusiastic. Akashi noted that he intended to visit LTTE theoretician Balasingham in London on his way to Brussels.

19. (C) COMMENT: President Rajapakse's invitation to Norway to resume its role as facilitator is of course welcome, but the flap over Solheim's comments (which were not new) makes it clear the issue is not settled yet. Norwegian toughness towards the LTTE is welcome. We expect the Norwegians, the GSL and the LTTE to agree eventually on the parameters of Norwegian involvement. We believe Co-Chairs need to do some back to basics thinking in the Dec 19 meeting and should consider a shorter rather than longer statement. We will have more thoughts on this in our Co-Chairs Scenesetter.

LUNSTEAD